

## Top 10 Nebraska News Stories, 2009<sup>51</sup>

1. Gov. Dave Heineman called a special session in November to trim \$334 million from the \$6.9 billion two-year state budget passed by the Legislature during the 2009 regular session.

2. The national recession reached Nebraska, resulting in rising unemployment and a general decline in economic activity.

3. Nebraska adopted lethal injection to replace the electric chair as the state's sole method of execution. In 2008, the Nebraska Supreme Court ruled electrocution was cruel and unusual punishment, causing the Legislature to seek an alternative method.

4. More than a dozen Nebraska deaths were blamed on the H1N1 flu virus.

5. Court challenges to Nebraska's statewide smoking ban continued. An Omaha pool hall owner filed suit in October, claiming that exceptions provided for cigar bars, some hotel rooms, tobacco-only retailers, certain research facilities and private homes are unconstitutional.

6. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cornhuskers finished the year 9-4. The team's defense was led by Ndamukong Suh, who finished fourth in the year's Heisman Trophy voting.

7. U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson voted for national health care reform after negotiating tens of millions in federal Medicaid funds for Nebraska.

8. In a nonbinding decision, a Colorado-based arbitrator ruled that Nebraska owes Kansas \$10,000 for alleged overuse of Republican River basin water in 2005 and 2006.

9. Nebraska lawmakers passed a bill allowing those wrongfully imprisoned to sue the state for up to \$500,000. The measure was prompted by a case in which DNA evidence cleared six people wrongfully convicted of the 1985 rape and murder of a Beatrice woman.

10. Former Lexington middle school teacher Kelsey Peterson was sentenced to eight to 10 years in prison on sexual assault charges. Peterson fled to Mexico with a 13-year-old student in the fall of 2007.

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<sup>51</sup> Source: Associated Press; surveys of Nebraska newspaper editors and broadcast news directors.

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1. Sluggish tax receipts and revenue projections painted a dismal budget picture for state lawmakers. Nebraska faces a projected shortfall of \$986 million over the next two-year budget cycle.

2. The Nebraska Cornhuskers announced their decision to move from the Big 12 Conference to the Big 10. The move takes effect July 1, 2011, and the football team begins conference play next fall.

3, 4 (tie). June flooding in northeast Nebraska left one man dead and millions of dollars in damage. Ten dams failed in central Nebraska amid heavy rains and storm runoff.

3, 4 (tie). Fremont voters approved an ordinance in June aimed at preventing employers from hiring illegal immigrants and landlords from renting to them. The ordinance was to take effect in July, but was suspended by the city council pending the outcome of court challenges.

5. Former Cornhusker football player Ndamukong Suh was selected by the Detroit Lions as the second overall pick in the National Football League draft.

6. Controversy continued to surround the proposed Keystone XL pipeline that would carry Canadian oil through Nebraska and several other states to Gulf Coast refineries.

7. Efforts to reform Nebraska's child welfare system were complicated by the loss of three of the state's five independent lead contractors.

8. The Nebraska State Fair moved to Grand Island after legal efforts to keep the fair in Lincoln failed.

9. The Nebraska Cornhusker women's basketball team finished the season at 32-2, falling to Kentucky in the NCAA regional semifinals.

10. Dana College, a 126-year old private Lutheran college in Blair, closed after a failed attempt to transfer its accreditation to new for-profit owners.